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C H E R U B S I N A R T

CHERUBS FROM THE SISTINE MADONNA, BY RAPHAEL

ANGEL, BY FRA BARTOLOMMEO

CHERUB, BY SASSOFERRATO

HOLY CHERUBS, BY RUBENS

THE TARGET, BY BOUCHER

ANGEL HEADS, BY REYNOLDS

By GUSTAV KOBBE

Author and Critic

THE word cherub as used in defining the angelic order to which the term is strictly applied has a limited meaning. But on the very human principle that all beautiful children are angels—until it is discovered that they are not—the meaning of the word has been extended. In consequence, it embraces not only baby angels, but even those chubby little rascals known as cupids, who dart about with bows and arrows and use the susceptible human heart for a target. That is why pictures illustrating the cherub in art may be of such wide range, and include works like the two famous cherubs of Raphael, the cherub of Sassoferrato, the young angel playing on a lute by Fra Bartolommeo, Reynolds' angel heads, Boucher's "Cible d'Amour" (Cupid's Target), and even Rubens' "Holy Cherubs," a group in which, strictly speaking, there is no cherub at all.

The most famous cherubs ever painted are those of Raphael. When "Raphael's Madonna" is spoken of only one of his many Madonnas is



REPOSE IN EGYPT

From a painting by Van Dyck in the Pitti Gallery, Florence.

meant,—the “Sistine Madonna” in the Dresden gallery. Other Madonnas by him also are famous; but this so far outdoes them all in fame that it is known simply as his Madonna.

THE WORLD’S MOST FAMOUS PICTURE

There can be but little doubt that the “Sistine Madonna” is the most famous picture in the world. It is enormously popular throughout the Christian world, and likely represents to the majority of people not a great work of art nor even a great Madonna, but rather a pictorial interpretation of sacred motherhood. In Dresden it is in a gallery by itself, as in a shrine; and the copying of it is now forbidden. Of course there already exist numerous reproductions of it, and in the Dresden shops it appears in all kinds of souvenirs. Dresden may be said to be under the spell of the “Sistine Madonna.”

Quite as famous as Raphael's Madonna are Raphael's Cherubs, which are a detail taken from this Madonna; and, as the "Sistine Madonna" is the most widely known picture of the Virgin, so no cherub or group of cherubs is so famous as the two that lean on the altar top indicated at the very bottom of the picture. These cherubs, however, are not just pretty cherubs: they have both artistic and allegorical meaning in the composition. If you examine a reproduction of the entire picture, you will discover one reason for its being a great work of art, and also why, in spite of Raphael's having been temporarily obscured of late years by artists of more vigorous and realistic tendencies, he is rapidly regaining his former importance.

The composition of this picture is not only in three planes of perspective, but also in three planes of elevation. Of the large figures the one farthest in perspective but also the most elevated, and therefore the most conspicuous, is the Madonna with the Child. These are the most sacred personalities in the painting. Hence they rise conspicuously above the others. The figures of Saint Barbara and Saint Sixtus are lower in elevation and nearer in perspective. The cherubs are at the bottom and very front of the picture. Despite their wings, they are intensely human little creatures, and may be said to represent humanity. Thus, on Raphael's canvas we have in gradually deepening perspective, but at the same time in rising elevation, the world, as represented by the two little human cherubs; the church, as represented by two of its saints; and the Godhead, as represented by the Son in the arms of His mother. If the interpretation I have essayed is correct, these two cherubs in art play a larger part in the allegory of the painting than is usually assigned to them.

One senses rather than actually sees the depth and elevation in this picture; for its three horizons are viewed in one. Raphael further enhanced the feeling of depth in the work by painting a frame within the frame, the painted frame being



ANGEL

A detail from a painting in the Vatican, by Raphael.



ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN
From painting by Rubens, in the Hof Museum, Vienna.

formed by the altar top below, on which the cherubs lean, the curtain rod above, and the curtains on the sides. First one looks into a scene; and then deeper and deeper into it, while at the same time the eye travels upward from cherubs to saints, from saints to Madonna. It may be, as some people think, that the two charming infants with wings were afterthoughts. Even so, however, they are not superfluous, but, exquisite in themselves, add to the harmonious beauty of the composition.

FRA BARTOLOMMEO'S ANGEL

Fra Bartolommeo painted in 1509 the young angel seated at the foot of a pedestal and playing a lute. Although more than four hundred years have elapsed since it left the hands of the master who produced it, it is still to be seen in the very spot where it was placed so long ago. The same contemporary authority to whom we owe the reference to the "Sistine Madonna" has left information regarding this picture by Fra Bartolommeo. "For the church of San Martino, in Lucca," writes Vasari, "this master painted a picture of the Madonna with an angel playing on a lute at her feet; San Stefano (Saint Stephen) stands on one side of the Virgin, and San Giovanni (Saint John) on the other; the work is a good one, whether as regards design or coloring, and affords full proof of the master's ability." From the point of view of the present, the calm, reserved contemporary praise bestowed upon pictures now considered among the great masterpieces of the world is both interesting and amusing.

In this picture are two other angels that cannot, like the angel of the lute, be detached from the composition and reproduced separately, yet are wonderfully graceful. They are lightly poised over the Virgin, and hold above her head a jeweled crown from which floats a saffron-colored veil in two streamers that add to the airiness of the design. The delicate color of their wings is seen against the lighter tones of the sky. The Ma-

donna, holding the Child in her lap, is on the pedestal at the foot of which sits the angel with the lute, clad in diaphanous drapery and with wings outspread, while he plays upon the instrument and sings. The vigorously modeled figures of the saints stand like two pillars holding the composition together. This picture, now priceless, was, according to an inventory of the time, valued at sixty ducats (about \$150).

Shortly before painting this picture Fra Bartolommeo had been drawn to Rome to see the work of the famous Raphael. It so filled him with admiration that he despaired of equaling it; and in consequence he cut short his stay, even leaving a picture he had begun for Raphael to finish. These facts are interesting, because there is what might be called a family resemblance between this angel with the lute of Fra Bartolommeo and the Raphael cherubs.

Gruyer, a French writer, speaks of the singular charm that Fra Bartolommeo understood how to impart to his pictures, by the angels with variegated wings which he frequently introduced, now flying lightly through the air and again seated tranquilly, playing on the mandolin or lute or lifting their voices in song. This passage, while general in its application to Fra Bartolommeo's work, fits almost exactly the angels in the Madonna from which is taken the delightful angel with the lute.

THE FLYING CHERUB OF SASSOFERRATO

The Cherub of Sassoferrato, the beautiful little angel flying gently and slowly as if about to alight, was kidnapped in 1901; for in that year the picture of which this plump morsel of winged babyhood is a part was stolen from the church of Santa Sabina in Rome. Fortunately it was recovered. The painting is "The



ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN
From painting by Titian, in the Academy, Venice.

Madonna of the Rosary," and was executed as an altar piece for the church. It is considered Sassoferrato's masterpiece. The Virgin holds the child in her lap; to the right of the chair or throne kneels Saint Dominic, to the left Saint Catharine. The cherub with folded arms that, well up in the picture, floats so gently toward the Madonna is balanced by another on the other side of the throne. This latter cherub's little hands are folded and raised in prayer. And there are still other cherubs' heads with wings arranged in a semicircle. This picture shows the care and finish that distinguished Sassoferrato's work, and his smoothness and beauty of expression; yet it avoids the exaggerated sweetness that in some of his work becomes insipid. The Cherub of Sassoferrato is distinctly lovely.

A GROUP OF RUBENS' CHERUBS

Rubens' "Holy Cherubs," to give the picture its usual English title, is a misnomer, unless we stretch the meaning of cherub to embrace not only the saints but even the Christ Child. The picture contains the infant Jesus, the infant Saint John, an angel, and a little girl. The popular title wholly ignores its religious significance and simply regards it as an attractive picture of children, one of the children, for reasons the average picture gazer is too indolent to trouble about, having wings. Even the title, "The Little Jesus, Saint John, and Two Angels" sometimes given to it—and in works on Rubens—is incorrect. There is only one angel,—the boy with wings. The little girl is not an angel, for the simple reason that in the angelic orders there are neither girl nor woman angels, strange as that phase of what is called angelology may seem to us of the modern world, in which woman plays so conspicuous and helpful a part.

A description of the picture will explain its significance. The Christ Child, shown in profile, is sitting on a cushion under a tree. With His right hand He is reaching out and patting the infant Saint John on the cheek. The baby saint, his back turned toward the spectator, is engaged in lively conversation with the Christ Child, and the gesture of his right hand, with the index finger extended, appears to give emphasis to what he is saying. With the other arm he fondles the lamb that a little angel is bringing up from the left. Behind the Christ Child kneels a little girl. In the right hand she holds a bunch of grapes, and with the left is reaching toward a vine with the object, doubtless, of plucking another bunch. In the right foreground are fruits; on the treetrunk is a climbing grapevine; there is a woody landscape. Thus we have in this picture the Christ Child, Saint John, the Lamb, an angel, and the Church or Holy Bride (represented by the little girl), a group the significance of which makes the title of "Holy



VISION OF EZEKIEL

From a painting by Raphael in the Pitti Gallery, Florence. It shows cherubs in a composition of extraordinary vigor.



WATER



AIR

Reproduced from a set of four paintings by Francesco Albani (1578-1660), representing the elements.

Cherubs" seem a far-fetched piece of sentimentality. With all it is a group of plump, healthy children with a lamb, and would readily pass as a secular canvas, were it not for the little angel.

The original of this picture is in Vienna. What is believed to be an atelier, or studio, copy of it is in Berlin. This is an example of the custom that prevailed with many old masters, of having much of their work executed by their young pupils, the master himself putting in the finishing touches. In Rubens' case, the farther away his customer lived the more work on the picture ordered by that customer was done by the pupils in Rubens' atelier. He had many of these. According to an eye-witness, they were usually to be found busily employed on various canvases on which the master had drawn in the subject with chalk and here and there indicated the color scheme that the pupils were to carry out. This done, Rubens went over the picture himself. The custom I have described accounts for the great number of pictures turned out by some of the old masters, and also for their uneven quality, since, not infrequently, the final touches of the master were insufficient to cover up the weaker work of the pupils.

CUPIDS IN AIRY PLAY

The French title of Boucher's "Target," "La Cible d'Amour," well expresses the scene. The little rogues of cupids are romping in air, wee aviators of two hundred years ago, created by the fancy of the French artist. The target of the cupids is a heart. They are keeping up their



FIRE



EARTH

Francesco Albani achieved great fame by his frescoes. His painting of cherubs and cupids is distinguished for its exquisite finish and natural charm.

marksmanship between campaigns. They are the bowmen of Venus, the archers of Love, and must not permit their skill to lapse for lack of adventure. This flight of cupids is a true flight of fancy.

Boucher was eminently a decorative painter. As was the case with Watteau and Fragonard, his popularity was for awhile obscured, because other styles of decoration succeeded the manner of their period. Now, however, there has been a revival of French eighteenth century decoration, and with it an appreciation of the harmonious blending of these pictures in the decorative scheme of that period, which is now frequently reproduced in so-called "period rooms" in private houses.

Boucher was a child of his day. His subjects are mostly of the so-called "galant" type,—shepherds and shepherdesses that look like disguised lords and ladies and are engaged in sentimental adventure, as it was understood at the time. He also painted Venuses and Dianas, and, as a portraitist, was a protégé of Mme. de Pompadour. Even the manner in which death came to him seemed to point a moral drawn from his own career as an artist. For one morning, in May, 1770, he was found dead before his easel, on which stood a picture of Venus.

But this artist's cupids are in a class by themselves. They are romping rogues, frolicsome creatures, happy at the mere thought of being alive and the wonder of it. The subtle delicacy of their rounded limbs, enchanting grace, their ease of gesture and charm of attitude, their cheerfulness and abandon, and, in general, their complete absorption in having

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a good time,—these characteristics stamp them as Boucher's. And, above all, their airiness and grace! They are petals, carnations, whole festoons of blossoms, floating merrily through space.

REYNOLDS' WINGED HEADS

Reynolds' "Angel Heads" is a picture neither of angels, of cupids nor of any other imaginary beings. It represents five different views of the head of a child, whose name was Frances Isabella Ker Gordon, the "blue-eyed, golden-haired daughter of Lord William Gordon, her sweet face seen in five different winged heads amongst the clouds."

This is possibly the best known of all Reynolds' pictures of children. He painted the cluster of little cherubs in 1786, a date near the close of his great career; so that the different expressions of the same charming face would seem to reveal his knowledge, gained from his long experience as an artist, of the subtleties of the child mind as reflected in the child face. Here are innocence, reflection, wonder, joy, and affection, according as one chooses which of the five heads of little Miss Gordon to contemplate. It has been remarked of this picture, that it has been cheapened by frequent copies, in which the delicate essence of the original has been allowed to



THE GARLAND OF FRUIT

From a painting by Rubens. An interesting example of the great Flemish master's art in depicting the cherub type.



DANCE OF CUPIDS

From a painting by Francesco Albani (1578-1660).

evaporate. "But a glance at the picture itself renews the spell of the master." It is England's contribution to the cherub in art.

One authority says that the face is as nearly angelic as a human portrait can be made. Certainly the heads are angelic in respect to beauty, grace, and innocence. Lord Gordon paid Reynolds a hundred guineas (\$500) for the work, which would now bring many times that sum. The charming little girl whose head the picture shows in five different poses grew up but remained unmarried, and died in 1831. After her death her mother presented the picture to the National Gallery.

From all that has been written herein, it is quite evident that the cherub in art is a distinguished little being. For has he not engaged the services of some of the most famous masters of their time and country? Moreover, it is true that pictures of which they form a part are to be found in the great collections of the world,—Raphael's "Madonna" in the Dresden gallery; Rubens' "Holy Cherubs" in the Imperial Museum, Vienna; Boucher's "Target" in the Louvre; Reynolds' "Angel Heads" in the National Gallery; while the cherubs of Bartolommeo and Sassoferrato have made the churches in which they still hang, after the lapse of the centuries since they were painted, points of pilgrimage for lovers of the beautiful in art.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Raphael	<i>Masterpieces in Color</i>	Paul G. Konody
Rubens	<i>Masterpieces in Color</i>	S. L. Bensusan
Reynolds	<i>Masterpieces in Color</i>	S. L. Bensusan
Boucher	<i>Les Grande Artistes</i>	G. Kahn
Fra Bartolommeo	<i>Illustrated Biographies of the Great Artists</i>	Leader Scott
Outlines of the History of Art		Dr. Wilhelm Lübke

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Anyone desiring further information concerning the subject of the week can obtain it by writing to the "Inquiry Department" of the Associated Newspaper School, Nineteenth Street and Fourth Avenue, New York City. A list of all previous issues of "THE MENTOR" will be sent free on request. Price per issue ten cents.

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By *BURGES JOHNSON*













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